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CONTENTS

- 03 Preface
- 05 News

TOPICAL ISSUES

- 08 Don't underrate the value of internships
- 11 Internship programme for grain silo managers
- 13 New Senwes CEO to focus on technology and innovation

ECONOMY OF THE GRAIN STORAGE SECTOR

- 14 Current and predicted effects of climate change on SA's grain industry
- 19 Mycotoxin risk management: What, where, and how

REGULATIONS & OPERATIONS

- 21 Final Network Statement: A step closer to moving grain by rail again
- 22 Agbiz Grain SHEQ seminar exceeds expectations
- 24 ESG: Implications for the grain and oilseeds sector
- 26 Members and associate members
- 28 Points to ponder: Balancing of trends



EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Annelien Collins
012 807 3002
annelien@agbizgrain.co.za

Publisher
Plaas Media (Pty) Ltd
217 Clifton Ave, Lyttelton, Centurion
Private Bag X2010, Lyttelton, 0140
Tel: 012 664 4793
www.plaasmedia.com

Chief executive officer
Lynette Louw
084 580 5120
lynette@plaasmedia.co.za

Deputy editor
Jayne du Plooy
jayne@plaasmedia.co.za

Layout & design
Inge Geros
inge@plaasmedia.co.za

Sales manager & accounts
Marné Anderson
072 639 1805
marne@plaasmedia.co.za

Advertisement sales
Karin Changuion-Duffy
082 376 6396
karin@plaasmedia.co.za

Susan Steyn
082 657 1262
susan@plaasmedia.co.za

Luan van der Schyff
081 524 8559
luan@plaasmedia.co.za

Illa Hugo
082 898 3868
illa@plaasmedia.co.za

Subscriptions
Beauty Mthombeni
064 890 6941
beauty@plaasmedia.co.za

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Published on behalf of
Agbiz Grain
012 807 3002
1st floor, Grain Building,
477 Witherite Road,
The Willows, Pretoria
Email: annelien@agbizgrain.co.za
www.agbizgrain.co.za

Agricultural resilience can ensure food security

By Minister John Steenhuisen

The drought has laid bare the extraordinary resilience of our producers. Despite grappling with the harsh realities of climate change, these unsung heroes continue to toil, ensuring our country remains food secure. Their unwavering commitment is a testament to their courage and determination.

The farming industry is characterised by a unique mix of natural risks and economic pressures. Some of the biggest challenges producers face are the ever-rising cost of inputs, the need for insurance, and the heavy burden of debt. They also face a unique challenge, namely being price takers and not price makers. This means they have little control over the market prices for their products.

Rising input costs, such as for fuel and fertiliser, also lead to shrinking profit margins. The drought has exacerbated this problem, with many producers forced to sell their products at a loss just to stay afloat.

I have heard many stories of how producers in Mpumalanga, Northeastern Free State, and Northern Cape came together to pray for relief, encouraged each other not to give up, and shared valuable advice to overcome this difficult time. The drought has once again highlighted the need for co-operation and innovation to address the challenges of climate change.

Removing market barriers

As the Department of Agriculture, we must find innovative ways to support these vital contributors to our economy. In 2025 and beyond, the department will continue to prioritise improving on expanding existing markets and opening new markets for our products in countries where rapid urbanisation and rising incomes are fuelling demand for imported food products.

In recent months, we have met with various commodity organisations to identify potential new markets as well as blockages and red tape that hamper the industry from functioning optimally.

Closer to home, we need to mine the full potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area by finding solutions to overcome logistical challenges, non-tariff barriers, and sanitary and phytosanitary issues. We all know with public-private partnerships, we can move faster to ensure much needed investment in infrastructure, such as ports and cold storage facilities.

The road to G20

On 1 December last year, we became the first country on the continent to assume the G20 presidency. This is a huge opportunity to highlight and drive much needed awareness of food insecurity, and mobilise global commitment to reduce hunger and food insecurity.

We must work on targeted policies, partnerships, and investment to support inclusive market participation and empower the youth, women, and persons with disabilities to aid in efforts to promote rural development, reduce systemic inequalities, and foster inclusive economic growth.

In this era where the harsh realities of climate change are already impacting traditional farming, we need to agree that speedier transformation of our agri-food systems is needed. However, this transformation cannot be one sided. We need collaborative solutions, informed by inputs from all stakeholders, to ensure meaningful change in our food systems to harness food security and sustainable development.

Last year, the then Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, in collaboration with the Human Sciences Research Council,



John Steenhuisen.

released the *National Food and Nutrition Security Survey (NFNSS)* that indicates around 20 million of our population are experiencing food insecurity, with reasons ranging from high poverty levels, income inequality, and unemployment. This report also notes the impacts of climate change, which is affecting crop yields and increasing the frequency and severity of droughts and floods, and in particular its devastating effects on smallholder and subsistence farming.

The *NFNSS* gives us a clear baseline to guide our 2024 to 2029 National Food and Security Plan, which is high on our list of priorities.

Curbing food waste

Be that as it may, one stark fact remains: While millions experience hunger, a staggering amount of food that is still safe and edible ends up in landfills. Let's be honest, interventions have been slow to turn the situation around. Around ten million tons of the agricultural output is wasted and lost with the bulk being fruit and vegetables.

We need to take hands with the value chain to identify where the waste is happening and find ways to repurpose the 'food waste'. This will require all of us to work closer together to put mechanisms in place that will be beneficial for the sector and enhance our efforts to mitigate hunger. [2](#)



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GOSA symposium 2025 around the corner

GOSA's 40th annual symposium will take place at the Diaz Strand Hotel in Mossel Bay on 18 and 19 March 2025. The symposium's theme will be "Innovating South Africa for a more competitive global market" and will include presentations regarding the current economic and political landscape, a climate outlook, innovation in the handling and storage space, as well as the psyche and principles behind competitiveness to effectively compete in a competitive global market.

The symposium provides an excellent platform to expand your network and to meet new role-players across all aspects of the grain value chain. Registration closes on 6 March 2025 or when we are fully booked – whichever comes first.

Visit the website at grainorgsa.co.za for more information or follow GOSA on social media. – GOSA

Development of SHEQ compliance audit protocol

During the November 2024 Agbiz Grain SHEQ (safety, health, environmental, and quality) seminar held in Pretoria, the need for a standardised SHEQ Compliance Audit for the grain handling and storage sector was one of the panel topics.

The grain handling and storage sector consists of many facilities across South Africa that differ in type, size and age of construction. Such differences result in the sector being challenged by distinct SHEQ risks and mitigation methods, not just in terms of compliance obligations, but also regarding the insurability of the sector.

Although there was unanimous agreement that the sector needs a specific SHEQ compliance protocol, the development of such a document will require all grain handling and storage stakeholders to participate. A sector committee was established and includes nominated participants from industry stakeholders.

The committee will commence early in 2025 with the first step to confirm the scope of the audit protocol and to identify all SHEQ compliance obligations relevant to all types of grain handling and storage facilities. The identified obligations will be used to develop a SHEQ compliance audit protocol. Existing audit protocols of external service providers will also be considered.

The committee then needs to identify an independent auditing body, and determine the audit frequency and requirements. A standardised SHEQ compliance audit protocol will not only allow for the compliance evaluation of each stakeholder but will result in the collective growth of the sector.

The nominated sector compliance committee members are Luven Naidoo of AFGRI Grain Management Service (Pty) Ltd, Lester du Plooy of Agrimark Operations, Elize de Beer of NWK, Jaco Joubert of Overberg Agri, Fabian Boysen of OVK, Lionel Smit of Schoeman Boerdery, Adeline Earle of Senwes, Mariska Malan of SSK, André Badenhorst of TWK Agri, and Gerhard Lourens of VKB/GWK. – *Jaco Joubert, Overberg Agri*

New grain and soya bean terminal in Saudi Arabia

National Grain Company, a joint venture between the Saudi Agricultural and Livestock Investment Co (SALIC) and Saudi shipper Bahri, have opened a new grain and soya bean terminal in Saudi Arabia.

Constructed over a two-year period, the facility can handle up to three million t/year of grain including barley, maize and soya beans. It is the first regional centre for grains in the Yanbu port, according to the company. The new terminal has a storage capacity of 156 000 tonnes, including 12 silos with a total capacity of 96 000 tonnes and a flat warehouse with 60 000 tonnes of capacity, a 650m conveyor belt, and a ship grain unloading capacity of 800 t/hour.

Abdulrahman Al-Fadley, Saudi Arabia's minister of environment, water and agriculture and chairperson of the board of SALIC, says the terminal would help boost the origination and discharge of grains to Saudi Arabia and enhance supply chain capabilities. – *World Grain*

Expectations for 2025: Question bank

Agbiz Grain, in conjunction with Lizelle Jacobs of MindAlive, plans to complete a number of important projects in 2025. One of these is the *Fumigation of Stored Agricultural Products* skills programme curriculum, which is in its final stage. Valuable inputs were received from the fumigation work group and the final curriculum will be presented to all members in February, after which it will be submitted to AgriSETA for registration with the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO).

The *Grain Depot Manager* occupational qualification has been registered on the Occupational Qualifications Framework (OQF) for a year, and skills development providers are currently training students to become world-class depot managers.

However, this qualification can only be certified once the student has written the *External Integrated Assessment* (EISA), a nationally standardised assessment administered in accredited assessment centres. Industry subject-matter experts are responsible for compiling a question bank from which each EISA can be compiled.

Agbiz Grain has received nominations for experts who have helped with this important task during 2024. Unfortunately, this process is a year behind schedule. Urgent attention is needed to ensure students can apply for certification via the EISA when they complete their training at the end of 2025.

Agbiz Grain plans to develop accredited skills programmes for

sampling and grading of various agricultural commodities for training students on specific commodities. A funding application has been submitted to AgriSETA for the development of the curriculum and learning material for maize (white and yellow), wheat, soya beans, and sunflower seed in 2025. The same will be done for barley, canola, sorghum, and groundnuts in 2026.

The process to be followed is similar to the one used for the *Fumigation Skills Programme* currently in development. A working group will be nominated from the grain industry and, along with a facilitator, will develop the outline and scope of each skills programme. All curricula are submitted to the QCTO for registration.

– Lizelle Jacobs, MindAlive

Research grant to improve pest management in grain storage

Researchers at the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (UTIA) and the US Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) have received a grant of more than US\$324 000 from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to develop efficient monitoring systems for insect infestations in grain storage and large-scale food processing facilities.

These advanced automated sensors, insect traps and robotic technologies will work together to identify which pest species are present, determine the location of contaminated areas and generate estimations of pest population sizes in stored maize, wheat, tobacco, hops and more.

An autonomous ground robot will also be developed to acquire data to produce reliable 2-D floor maps of infestations, ensuring control strategies use minimal pesticides and are accurately applied before significant food and financial loss occurs.

Chetan Badgajar, project lead and agricultural engineer in the University of Tennessee Department of Biosystems Engineering and Soil Science, said the new systems will reduce post-harvest losses and contamination in the global food market and supply chain.

“Current detection methods are often inaccurate, time consuming and labour intensive. Our new devices will provide automated reports of infestations thanks to an advanced, robotic-based recognition system that is functional anywhere and with any local insect populations,” he explained. – *Feedstuffs*

India expands grain storage plan

Under the pilot phase of the ambitious World's Largest Grain Storage Plan in the co-operative sector, godowns have been successfully constructed at Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) in 11 states across India. These include Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam, Telangana, Tripura, and Rajasthan.

The initiative, supported by the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), and NABARD Consultancy Services (NABCONS), has achieved a total storage capacity of 9 750 metric tonnes.

Of the 11 constructed storage units, three – located in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Telangana – are retained for PACS' own use. Another three facilities, in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat, have been hired out to state or central agencies, demonstrating the project's versatility in addressing both local and institutional grain storage needs. – *DD News*

Narratives shaping SA's 2025 production

We find ourselves in a tricky crop season. At its start, we expected a recovery from the 2023/24 season characterised by El Niño induced drought damage. It started to rain in most regions of the country from mid-December 2024 to January 2025, and continued to rain at the time of this note's publication. Grazing veld showed the promise of recovery, but concerns remain now that producers who have not yet completed planting are struggling to get into the fields because of the wet weather conditions.

The main risk with planting late is the possibility of frost damage later in the season. If the country is fortunate to be spared from frost, as we have seen in recent seasons, the prospects for a better harvest remain, even for late plantings. Higher white maize prices in South Africa may be a reality in the first quarter of 2025 and relief may become evident in the second quarter of the year. – *Wandile Sihlobo, Agbiz*

US grain transportation gets a boost

Projects directly supporting grain transportation in the United States (US) received a total of nearly US\$60 million in funding through the fiscal 2025 *Rebuilding Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity* (RAISE) discretionary grant programme.

The city of Galesburg in Illinois received a US\$25 million grant that will be used to install rail track for an intermodal grain export facility to be built on 100 acres (just over 40ha) by the DeLong Co. When complete, the facility will support containerised grain exports to West Coast ports, via the BNSF Railway (BNSF).

The project is anticipated to have a significant positive impact on the region's agricultural community by opening a new export market for commodities to Asia. This new overland rail shipping route reduces cargo transit by approximately 4 000 miles when compared to using the Mississippi River and Port of New Orleans to ship commodities westward.

Another US\$25 million grant will be used in Stafford County in Kansas to support construction of a rail-served transload facility and shuttle-loading grain elevator on a BNSF line. Construction is anticipated to start in March and cost US\$32,5 million. In Richland in Washington the Port of Benton received a US\$9,6 million RAISE grant to repair or replace sections of the short-line railroad serving the port.

One of the port's customers is Central Washington Corn Processors (CWCP), a 2,1 million bushel/grain transload facility that supports livestock operations throughout the region. With takeaway speeds of up to 40 000 bushels per hour, the facility can unload shuttle trains, 120 rail cars, in under 15 hours. – *World Grain*

First white maize imported since 2017

South Africa recently offloaded its first white maize vessel since March 2017 in Durban. The country has not imported white maize since the big drought of 2016/17. This trend changed with last year's poor crops, record exports to Zimbabwe, and record high prices.


During the 2023/24 production year, grains and oilseeds experienced a poor year with production declining from the previous year by approximately 22,5% in the case of maize and 33,5% for soya beans. In November 2024 the final estimate of the Crop Estimates Committee for white maize production was at 6,007 million tonnes, down by 29,3%, and yellow maize was at 6,716 million tonnes, down by 15,4%. In the South African seasonal crop cycle, these products should last until approximately March/April 2025 before the new crop (planted in November and December 2024) becomes available again.

Looking at South African demand only, this means the country had just enough grains to feed itself. However, from a Southern African perspective, during most years, South Africa also supplies countries such as Botswana and Namibia with the bulk of their demands. What the South African grain industry did not fully anticipate was that the drought would also affect crop production in the countries around us, and we saw strong demand from particularly Zimbabwe, not only for white but also yellow maize. As early as the end of February 2024, it became evident that South Africa would have to import yellow maize and possibly white maize and soya beans. – *Press release, SACOTA*

Drought impacts NWK income

Last year's drought is cited as the biggest contributor to the almost 50% drop in the North West-based agricultural company NWK's half-year profit, from R133 million in October 2023 to R69 million in October 2024.

According to an NWK press release, most of the company's service area did not receive enough rain, accompanied by extremely high temperatures during critical phases of 2023/24's crop development. The region was able to realise only around 40% of the previous year's maize harvest, which amounted to only a sixth of the average harvest.

However, NWK's half-year income increased by 1,6% from R2,897 billion in October 2023 to R2,943 billion in October 2024. Despite the drought, NWK still issued an interim dividend of 14c/share. This represents a total of R15 million allocated for distribution to shareholders. – *Susan Marais, Plaas Media* 

Don't underrate the value of internships

By Susan Marais, Plaas Media

Do not neglect interns by having them do menial work that keeps them from really sinking their teeth into the business aspects of a company to gain some much-needed industry experience.

This is the advice that United States-based labour consultant, Dustin Toberman, president and founder of OMNI Ag Consulting, shared during an episode of the Grain Elevator and Processing Society's (GEAPS) *Whole Grain Podcast*. Toberman spoke with Jim Lenz, manager of GEAPS' training and educational programmes.

The workplace has seen a shift, said Toberman, and grain businesses need to keep this in mind to make the most of internships, which can cost a lot in terms of time and resources. "In my 25 years in agriculture, I can recall a time when you would open a position, and you had so many candidates coming at you that you didn't know what to do. The reality is, however, that times have changed. Companies are fighting each other for good talent."

There is a reason why internships are so valuable at the moment. "It gives you the opportunity to identify talented young people before they're established and have entered the open market. It gives you the inside track on them before they're scooped up by someone else."

This is important, because all hiring moves – good or bad – will affect a company's growth trajectory for years to come, Toberman stressed. "I ultimately believe this is the key to the success or failure of a business, so there is a lot on the line."

Real structure, real gains

The sun has set on the idea of informal internships. "There was a time when internships were very informal. It was almost treated like a summer job and interns were used as cheap alternative to hiring someone. This has changed," Toberman said, adding that the modern expectation is that students will have

a deeper, more hands-on experience of what's really taking place in a business.

"The days where interns were ordered to grade grain or measure bins are in the past. Today students are working on bid sheets and are learning what it means to trade and originate grain." Therefore, Toberman suggested letting interns move out into the world and interact with customers. "Then they are truly immersed in the experience and are enabled to sharpen their skills."

As many interns struggle with client interactions, this will help them hone their skills, so that one day they'll be able to step into the market and use what they've learned with confidence.

Internships are also the ideal opportunity to 'test drive' potential employees and challenge them to see what they are capable of. "At the end of the internship I want to know if the candidate is worth investing in."

It is also important to keep in mind that these interns will return to their tertiary institutions and tell others about their experience, and a company wants that to be a positive story. "If they tell their classmates and professors that they wasted all summer on manual labour at your company, it will not do your company any favours. This will hurt you down the road, because when trying to grow your business to the point

where interns start looking your way, they'll know that you do not take your internship programme seriously."

Target top talent

Internships are not about filling a low-level entry position. Businesses should be asking if a candidate is someone that might someday be a leader within the organisation. "If you are really thinking about developing and retaining talent within the company culture, it's all about hiring the right type of individual. And internships are the perfect chance to do this."

Through structure interns can truly become involved in the day-to-day operations of the business, Toberman said. Exposing them to as many aspects of the daily grind will challenge interns and allow them to quickly show their mettle. "So, do not be afraid to have them sit in a boardroom or sit in on high-level meetings. Do not be afraid to let them look at a profit and loss statement.

Any company that wants to attract and retain the best and brightest candidates must implement this. "Any company that does not treat an internship programme seriously will not receive any intern placements from my organisation. That is how seriously we take interns at our company."

Challenging interns could also be good for the business as an intern might have ideas



that the company has not considered. "They might bring a completely new perspective to the table. And that is how we become better."

Make mentorship a priority

According to Toberman, the anchor of a good internship programme is mentorship. "Everyone needs a career champion. After all, the people in the network of your professional life are the ones that will have the biggest impact on your career.

"Years ago, interns would join a company and often they'd merely wander around aimlessly. Frankly, this was a waste of everybody's time. That is why it is a great idea to link an intern to a specific person." While the pairing won't be joined at the hip, it is a person that can check in with the intern from time to time. "Remember, we are dealing with young professionals who could be 20 or 22 years old, but they are still students. Many of them don't have experience of the professional world and some of the work aspects could be overwhelming."

Often, interns are far from home, and this might even be the first time that they are this far from home. "I've seen interns that have been very overwhelmed by this. And they did not feel like they had any connection to the workplace. They had nobody to talk to and left, because they could not handle the pressure."

Toberman said this was unfortunate for both sides, because a workplace might miss out on a great candidate, while the intern might miss out on an important career opportunity.

"It's also a good idea to connect interns to each other. That way they can share their collective experiences. It's crucial to remember that these are humans that need social interaction. We need to consider their emotions when looking at internships."

Real feedback

While nobody likes hearing about their shortcomings, Toberman explained that feedback is a critical final step for any

internship programme. "A big mistake that company leaders make is to get so wrapped up in their day-to-day tasks that they forget that it's the intern's last week and that they need to debrief him/her. To talk to an intern for ten minutes could lead to incredible feedback."

Most people might be hesitant to share what they liked and disliked about the programme. However, if they are asked to give a presentation on their time at the company, they might be willing to share some insights, because it is perceived as less threatening.

Debriefing the relevant managers is also critical, because they can give greater insight with regard to whether the intern could be a potential future leader in the company.

Through feedback sessions, interns are also able to identify their strongpoints and the areas in their professional lives that need improving. ²

The GEAPS podcast can be accessed at www.geaps.com/news-publications/whole-grain-podcast/. The relevant episode (episode 39) was aired in July 2024.

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Internship programme for grain silo managers

Agbiz Grain and the Peritum Agri Institute are joining forces to grow a pipeline of work-ready grain silo managers in South Africa.

In addition to affording 70 young people access to a career in grain storage, it also addresses the dire skills shortage in grain depot management.

South Africa produces an average of 13,5 million tonnes of maize and another 1,9 million tonnes of wheat annually. In addition to this, other grains such as barley and sorghum, as well as oilseeds such as sunflower, canola and soya beans are grown at scale.

Approximately 70% of this grain and oilseeds produced in South Africa are stored by the 12 members of Agbiz Grain. Collectively, these companies have 334 silo complexes that include concrete silos, silo bags, and bunkers.

The intake and storage of grains and oilseeds is in the hands of a grain depot manager who ensures that the product is classified and graded according to the *Agricultural Product Standards Act, 1990 (Act 119 of 1990)* before it is allowed to be traded. Scavengers also dry, aerate, and smoke the product for safe storage.

Getting a grain silo manager professionally ready through exposure or work experience takes between eight and 12 years, and as a result this profession has been listed by AgriSETA as a critical and scarce skill. Agbiz Grain took the initiative and developed a qualification for the training of grain silo managers. The Occupational Certificate: Grain Depot Manager was accredited by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) in 2023.

Peritum Agri Institute was the first, and currently only, training company to obtain accreditation to offer this qualification. Peritum College, located in the Free State,



is currently the largest private agricultural college in South Africa.

The good news

Agbiz Grain members in the grain silo industry in South Africa, in collaboration with Peritum College, are now offering matriculants and young people under the age of 25 the chance to pursue a career in grain storage.

The Occupational Certificate: Grain Depot Manager is a practice-oriented study that is completed over a two-year period and prepares the student for a profession in grain storage management. In 2025, a guaranteed internship will be offered to 70 young South Africans who enrol for this field of study at the Peritum Agri Institute.

In 2025, enrolled students will attend seven academic study weeks at the Peritum Campus, followed by online study of the academic material and Teams-based time with their lecturers. During this year, students complete the theoretical content of the qualification. They will also have the opportunity to

visit the agricultural company where they will be placed for internships.

In year two, 2026, students will be placed at a grain silo for ten months for workplace-based learning. This placement allows the students to complete the practical components of the qualification, and the tasks associated with it.

In 2027, the placement changes to a paid internship with the same agribusiness. It offers students the opportunity to gain sufficient work experience before they take the final examination in the qualification at the end of 2028.

This programme not only accelerates the development process of grain silo managers, but it also provides an affordable opportunity for young South Africans to obtain both a relevant qualification and job placement in the agricultural sector.

Internship placements are available in Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North West, the Free State, and Western Cape. [📍](#)

Enquiries can be directed to Odette Shepperson, marketing manager at the Peritum Agri Institute, at marketing@peritumagri.com or 051 451 1120.

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New Senwes CEO to focus on technology and innovation

By Susan Marais, Plaas Media

Debbie Bester, the Senwes Group's new CEO, wants to empower clients and producers with resources, support, and innovation to let their businesses thrive.

"Over the past few years Senwes has prioritised cost savings and efficiencies with regard to our grain business. We will continue to focus on optimisation, efficiencies, and cost management. However, we will also investigate opportunities for expansion to grow our market share," Bester told *Agbiz Grain Quarterly*.

This outlook fits in with this qualified chartered accountant's plans for the Senwes Group: "Innovation and the promotion of technology are essential, and I would like to make that a focus of the entire group."

In January, the Senwes board of directors announced that Bester will be taking over the reins from retiring CEO, Francois Strydom, on 1 April this year. Bester is the first female to step into this role at Senwes. It is also the first time a woman will be spearheading a diversified South African agricultural company.

The group's chairperson, Danie Minnaar, said after a gruelling seven-month recruitment process, Senwes' board unanimously decided to appoint Bester. "The board wanted to find a visionary capable of working in a team and who is trusted by all relevant stakeholders. Off course unassailable integrity and empathy are also vital."

Bester has already made heavy inroads in terms of Senwes' strategic planning. According to Minnaar, she played a key role in the past to ensure that the group's costs were being watched with a hawk's eye and funds used as efficiently

as possible. "This appropriate use and management of capital in all forms have greatly improved our business and have already been integrated into our strategic decision-making."

Local and international experience

Bester hails from the Free State, but after completing her initial degree in accounting she joined international financial powerhouse PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC). Among others, she worked in America, which helped her gain international experience.

Finally, she returned to South Africa where she joined another North West-based agribusiness, the Suidwes Group. There she was able to climb the corporate ladder and was first promoted to group financial manager and then chief financial manager in July 2019.

After the Suidwes and Senwes merger in October 2020, Bester stayed on at the company in the role of financial director of Hinterland. In July 2021 she was promoted to the position of executive manager of group reporting and corporate finances.

Bester moved on to become the company's acting chief financial officer before being promoted to executive manager of finance and business design in 2023. This role afforded her the opportunity to focus on transactions to grow the business and streamline business processes, gaining valuable knowledge in understanding the complexities and intricacies of the groups' highly diversified business model.

All this experience makes her the ideal candidate for the CEO position, Minnaar said. "Her knowledge of and experience within Senwes, as well as her insight into the agricultural sector are very good, thanks to her years of experience within



Debbie Bester, newly appointed CEO of the Senwes Group. (Photograph: Senwes)

the sector, which is why the board's decision was unanimous."

A well-deserved retirement

After 14 years in the role of CEO, Strydom will be retiring this year. Minnaar thanked him for the outstanding period Senwes experienced under his leadership and praised him for the growth and success the group achieved in this period.

Strydom's successful career at Senwes started in 2001 with his initial involvement with the management and exit of certain businesses from the group's balance sheet. In June 2002 he was promoted to chief operating officer before being promoted to CEO in August 2010.

"We want to thank Strydom for his loyal service and invaluable contribution to the company over the past 24 years. He helped grow Senwes into the successful business it is today," Minnaar stated.

Under Strydom's guidance, Senwes has grown into one of the country's largest agribusinesses, operating in seven of the nation's nine provinces. The group also owns a John Deere business in Germany.

Although Bester will be taking over in April, Strydom will still be available in an advisory capacity until 31 July to ensure a smooth transition. [a](#)

For enquiries, visit the Senwes website at www.senwes.co.za.

Current and predicted effects of climate change on South Africa's grain industry

By Carin Venter

Maize, rice, wheat, and barley are among the most widely grown grain crops in the world and are all susceptible to changing climate conditions. In this regard, the grain industry finds itself in uncharted waters in terms of the expected long-term impact that climate change may have on the industry of which most crops are sensitive to temperature fluctuations and extreme warm or cold conditions.

Agbiz Grain Quarterly called on experts in the South African grain industry to find out what effect climate change could potentially have on the grain industry, and the way forward to ensure food sustainability and security.

The information they shared centred around the following areas:

- Maize production and rising carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels.
- Barley production and the malting process to obtain malted barley.
- Grain storage and pest control.

Rising atmospheric CO₂

According to a study by Profs Brad Ripley and Susanne Vetter of the Department of Botany at Rhodes University, and MSc

graduate Tebadi Burgess, most maize production relies on natural rainfall, making it vulnerable to changing rainfall patterns. This limitation is likely to intensify in future as climate change is predicted to lead to lower rainfall in many regions – this could decrease yields by 10% at the same time that global temperatures have increased by 4°C. Droughts are also predicted to become more frequent and severe, while warming will lead to increased evaporation and plants losing more water.

However, predicting what effects a changing climate will have on crop yields is difficult. This is because the effects of rainfall and temperature can interact in complex ways. Rising atmospheric CO₂,

which is a result of industrialisation, only adds to the uncertainty. And, as the authors' research conducted in South Africa shows, it may offset some of the impacts of drying and warming on maize crops in tropical growing regions such as those found in much of Africa.

In 2018, Rhodes University launched Africa's first large-scale elevated CO₂ plant research facility. Six different maize cultivars bred for South African climates were exposed to drought and watering treatments under ambient and elevated temperatures, as well as elevated CO₂. Plants were grown over the summer season and were either irrigated daily or left to grow with only the little rainfall that fell naturally. The study area has

Higher temperatures are predicted for many parts of the world and will have a direct effect on maize growth and productivity. (Photograph: Dwayne Kaschula)





South Africa's barley supply chain must invest in research, adaptive farming techniques, and improved storage technologies. All of these will be key to mitigating risk and ensuring that South Africa remains a reliable producer of high-quality barley amid a changing climate. (Photograph: Dwayne Kaschula)

too little summer rainfall to be a viable maize growing region; this allowed for the stimulation of drought effects under hot and dry summer conditions.

To examine the effect of atmospheric CO₂, current conditions of 400 parts per million (ppm) were compared to those predicted to occur towards the end of the 21st century (800 ppm). The air temperature in the open-top chambers was 4 to 5°C higher than ambient, which is in line with future climate predictions.

Study findings

Under ambient CO₂ and without watering, plants had very low yields. The yields from irrigated plants at elevated CO₂ were nearly four times higher. Adding elevated CO₂ to unwatered plants resulted in the same growth and yield as irrigation at ambient CO₂. This shows that elevated CO₂ had the same effect on plants as daily irrigation and thus completely compensated for drought. When given additional CO₂, plants needed less water because they could partially close their leaf pores and avoid water loss. Irrigated maize yields increased with added CO₂. This suggests that even under irrigation, hot and dry weather can cause water stress and reduce productivity.

This research shows that future atmospheric CO₂ concentrations could help alleviate the effects of warming and drought, even for irrigated production. However, more research is needed to determine the effects of intermediate CO₂

concentrations between 400 and 800 ppm, which will be experienced between now and the end of the century.

Future atmospheric CO₂ concentrations are likely to benefit maize production in tropical growing regions such as those found in many parts of Africa. This may extend the future land area available to rainfed maize cultivation by making maize production more water-use efficient. Data on the effects of other variables, such as a type of soil and severity of climate, are also needed to calibrate realistic models to forecast future maize production.

However, while CO₂ can prolong soil water availability and slow down the effect of drought on photosynthesis, it cannot completely compensate for a lack of rainfall. Thus, rainfall seasonality still plays an important role in determining where maize can be grown. With more data from tropical growing regions, our ability to predict this will increase.

Climate change and barley growth

Climate change brings about volatile temperatures, unpredictable rainfall patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, heatwaves, and cold spells. According to Manfred Venter, agronomy manager at AB InBev in South Africa, it presents new challenges relating to barley quality and storage in South Africa, from its impact on the growing season to the risks during storage.

The barley supply chain – spanning from producers to storage facilities – needs to implement climate-resilient practices to preserve the high standards required for malting and brewing industries.

Effects of climate change on barley

Barley is a cool season crop which thrives under temperate conditions with well-distributed rainfall or irrigation. In South Africa, these changes directly affect barley-growth in several ways:

- **Heat stress:** Higher temperatures, especially during the grain-filling period, can result in reduced grain size, lower starch accumulation, and compromised malting quality. Heat stress can also lead to premature ripening which reduces the overall yield and protein quality of barley.
- **Water stress and droughts:** In regions such as the Western and Northern Cape, droughts are becoming more frequent, limiting water availability during critical growth stages. Water stress during barley's vegetative or reproductive stages can severely impact grain quality, leading to lower yields, and an increase in protein content which impacts the malting and brewing industries.
- **Rainfall during harvest:** Climate change has also led to more frequent and unpredictable rainfall events during the harvest period. Currently rainfall increases the moisture content of barley, which elevates the risk of pre-germination (or 'pre-sprouting') in the ear.

Pre-germination not only degrades malting quality, but also results in significant economic losses, since sprouted grains are often unsuitable for the brewing process.

- **Frost damage:** Frost is another threat intensified by climate variability. Frost occurring during sensitive growth stages, particularly during flowering (anthesis) or booting, can cause severe damage to barley crops. During these stages, the crop is particularly vulnerable, and a late frost can destroy the developing heads, leading to yield loss and compromised grain quality. Frost-damaged barley often has lower germination rates, further reducing its suitability for malting.
- **Rainfall variability:** The unpredictability of rainfall can lead to delayed planting, uneven crop development, and harvest difficulties. Excessive rain during the early stages of crop development or during flowering can also interfere with pollination and grain formation, further impacting yield and grain quality.



Adaptation strategies for barley

To mitigate the negative impacts of climate change on barley quality and storage, South African producers and the broader supply chain need to adopt several adaptation strategies:

- **Breeding resilient barley varieties:** Ongoing research and development of barley varieties that can withstand variable climatic conditions, while maintaining malting quality, are critical. These resilient varieties can help stabilise yields and maintain grain quality despite fluctuating climatic conditions.
- **Improved water management:** Efficient irrigation systems can help optimise water use in barley fields, especially in water-scarce regions. Conservation agriculture practices, such as reduced tillage, can also improve soil moisture retention, thus increasing plant available water and reducing water stress on the crop.
- **Climate-controlled storage facilities:** With the increasing risks of temperature and humidity variations, modern storage facilities equipped with climate control mechanisms will be essential to maintaining barley quality during storage. Grain silos with cooling, ventilation systems, temperature monitoring, and pest control solutions can help preserve the integrity of the stored barley.

The grain handling sector should expect an increase in the number of insects in stored grain, while moisture and the prevalence of higher humidity is another cause for concern since it can lead to fungal infections in stored grain.

Impact on barley malting process

Barley is unique among grains because of its need to be kept alive for the malting process; this involves the controlled germination of barley grains during which moisture and temperature must be carefully regulated to allow enzymes to break down starches, which are later converted into fermentable sugars during brewing.

Climate change poses several risks to the malting process, says Daniel de Klerk, a South African Barley Breeding Institute (Sabbi) early-generation barley breeder.

Quality of the raw material: Too much heat or too little water during the growing season can result in poor quality grain because the latter usually requires great skill to malt. If barley is subjected to extreme heat or drought conditions during the grain filling period, it may fail to germinate properly or produce insufficient enzyme activity which is essential to the malting process.

Germination and malting conditions:

The malting process requires precise control of temperature, humidity, and air circulation. If climate change leads to less predictable weather conditions,

such as periods of excessive humidity or extreme heat, it could make the malting process more challenging. Malting houses will need to adapt their facilities and processes to cope with these variations, leading to increased costs and reduced efficiency.

Adapting breeding for climate resilience:

The unpredictability of climate change means being proactive in preparing for a range of potential future scenarios. While the specific impacts of climate change on the barley industry are still not fully understood, efforts are being broadened in barley breeding to ensure that varieties which can thrive under harsher conditions are available.

Drought tolerance: To address the potential for increased drought conditions, germplasm from international collaborators, who have made strides in improving drought tolerance, is actively being introduced. These collaborations help access genetic material that has been selected for resilience to dry conditions, which is crucial in preparing for more erratic rainfall patterns.

Speed breeding and counter season seed increases: In response to the growing

urgency to develop climate-resilient varieties in a shorter timeframe, advanced breeding techniques such as speed breeding and counter season increases are being leveraged. These methods allow for accelerating the breeding cycle, enabling the release of new barley varieties with improved climate tolerance in a fraction of the time it would take using traditional breeding methods.

Germination retention testing: Barley is particularly sensitive to environmental conditions, and its ability to retain germination energy is crucial for malting. To ensure the selection of varieties that are most likely to perform well under a range of conditions, germination retention tests are conducted. These tests help in identifying barley varieties that are more likely to retain their germination potential, ensuring that they still perform well during malting, even in challenging environmental conditions.

It is certain that climate change will have an impact on South Africa's barley industry. From shifting production areas and storage challenges to the complexities of malting and seed production, the industry will have to adapt to ensure long-term viability.

While the full extent of climate change's impact remains uncertain, proactive steps are being taken to prepare by broadening the genetic diversity of barley varieties, speeding up the breeding cycle, and investing in resilience testing. Sustainability will not only be a necessity for the future of agriculture, but also a driving force behind innovation in the barley industry.

Collaboration between breeders, producers, industry stakeholders,

and policymakers will be key to navigating these challenges and ensuring a stable, sustainable barley supply in the future.

Pest control and grain quality

According to Dr Gerhard Verdoorn, operations and stewardship manager at CropLife, the effect of climate change in the insect world can be seen in changing behaviour and rapidly increasing numbers. The grain storage sector is certainly not exempt from the detrimental effect insect pests have on stored grain. The sector should be on high alert and expect an increase in the number of insects in stored grain. In this regard, the monitoring of stored grain and effective fumigation are vital tools in keeping South Africa's grain piles free from grain insects and bacterial pathogens such as *Salmonella*.

Moisture and the prevalence of higher humidity is another cause for concern since it can lead to fungal infections in stored grain. Monitoring grain storage facilities requires the expertise of professional insect control operators, and this is why more emphasis is currently being placed on the treatment of stored grains by professionals.

Growers can no longer afford the risks associated with insect and fungal disease in stored grain, especially if one takes into consideration the occurrence of unpredictable or extreme climatic conditions (droughts, very wet conditions, etc.) which may threaten the livelihoods of grain growers. It is therefore important to inspect stored grain daily and start the fumigation process as soon as insects are identified.

Additional costs


The moisture levels of grain received at grain storage facilities must usually be

kept between 10 and 14%, depending on the commodity. Anything higher than this has a negative effect on the quality of the grain, and increases the risk of mycotoxins developing and possible lower-grade grain, says Leonard Henning, CEO of Henchem.

The moisture levels of wheat and maize should never exceed 14%. When these levels are too high (the maximum is 18%), the grain must be put in a dryer – this is a costly operation because of the electricity and/or diesel or coal which will be needed, handling costs, overtime, and the need for cooling fans afterwards. Furthermore, only a few fumigants used for insect control on stored grain will penetrate the moisture effectively, with most fumigants leading to the development of wet patches within the stored grain, which in turn will create the ideal environment for grain insects (referred to as hotspots).

Changing climate patterns can be challenging for growers who must take several factors into consideration when preparing for harvest and storage of grain. For instance, ongoing rain shortly before harvesting will lower the quality of the grain and lead to additional costs, such as putting the grain through dryers before being stored. Furthermore, when the moisture content of grain is too high, it will limit effective drying of the grain.^a

For enquiries, contact
Manfred Venter at
Manfred.venter@za.ab-inbev.com,
Daniel de Klerk on 083 306 9594,
Dr Gerhard Verdoorn at
gerhard@croplife.co.za, and
Leonard Henning
leonard@henchem.co.za.



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Mycotoxin risk management:

What, where, and how in the grain value chain

By Wiana Louw, general manager, The Southern African Grain Laboratory NPC

Mycotoxins have been around since the production of the first crops. They are stable chemical compounds produced by fungi infection and thus cannot be destroyed easily. The reasons why fungi produce mycotoxins and the contributing factors leading to a certain concentration are not fully understood.

Different fungi produce different mycotoxins, and certain fungi may contaminate the crop during the growing season and during storage, while others infect commodities during storage only. Furthermore, the environmental conditions that influence the formation of mycotoxins result in varying mycotoxin contamination and severity from season to season and between production regions.

Mycotoxin contamination is unavoidable and unpredictable, making it a unique challenge for food safety. One of the major risks is the misconception that the presence of mycotoxins can be determined by visual inspection of the grain. The only proven way to determine if grain is contaminated with mycotoxins is to test for it.

Why must we be concerned?

In the grain value chain, we need to take note of mycotoxins because of their toxicity and the fact that there are hundreds of mycotoxins, some of which are very dangerous and potential carcinogens.

Risk management strategies should consider the possible absence of the fungus that produced the mycotoxin while the toxin is still present, and that the formation of mycotoxins takes place during production and/or storage of grains. Even though grains may test negative for mycotoxins after harvesting, if stored under high moisture/humidity (>14%) at high temperature (>20°C) or if they are inadequately dried, the product can potentially become contaminated.

How to manage the risk

Regulations: For most of the mycotoxins detected on grains, maximum allowable residue limits based on internationally agreed levels are determined in South African regulations. The crops can be tested against these regulated levels to measure the risk and implement risk management strategies.

Sampling and sample preparation:

The samples analysed for mycotoxin contamination must be representative of the bulk consignment. Sampling procedures are described in grading regulations. The samples taken, using this prescribed procedure, are then milled to a particle size of less than 1mm. The milled samples are mixed thoroughly for at least 60 minutes before a subsample can be taken for analysis.

Methods of analysis: Based on the need for fast and accurate methods to determine mycotoxin contamination in food and feed samples, there is a focus globally on the development of screening methods. The gold standard for mycotoxin analysis remains liquid chromatography coupled with mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS). In addition, screening methods that can be used in non-laboratory environments can be used first. The accuracy of approved screening methods is then confirmed by comparing it to LC-MS/MS. The representative sample, sample preparation and proper mixing remain critical to generate accurate test results, irrespective of the analytical technique used.

Prevention methods: Contamination can be avoided in the field and during harvest through strategies such as crop rotation and cultivation of resistant crops. Plant stress as a possible contributing factor to contamination can be caused by high temperatures, drought, and poor fertilisation. The choice of the best seed variety per location, irrigation and balanced fertilisation can therefore be considered as possible prevention methods.

The prevention of crop damage (e.g. mechanical, insect, and bird damage) are also practices that can form part of risk management strategies. The harvesting date during seasons with unstable weather conditions, such as late rain, can increase the risk of contamination.

Contamination during storage can also be avoided by controlling the moisture and temperature levels as best as possible. Dry conditions with minimum temperature fluctuations are important control measures. Aeration by circulating air through the storage area to maintain uniform temperature levels are therefore critical. Sanitation and effective pest control measures are needed to prevent unnecessary risks for mycotoxin formation. Physical damage to the grains provides additional entry sites for fungal infection that can lead to mycotoxin contamination.

To implement effective risk management strategies, good analytical data over seasons and regions are required. Mycotoxin survey data on wheat and maize are available on a national level and can be used for this purpose. In addition to this national database, producers, storage operators and processors should ensure that they include mycotoxin testing as part of their procedures to effectively manage the risk in their own systems.

In conclusion

Not all mycotoxins are the same and we cannot test for only one mycotoxin to ensure food safety. Mycotoxin prevalence and concentration levels change between seasons and production regions. Grain grade cannot be used as an indicator of mycotoxin content because it is impossible to predict the presence/absence of mycotoxins by visual appearance. Proper sampling and sample preparation are critical to ensure reliable results; we need to keep on testing since we can only manage what we know.^[a]

Visit www.sagl.co.za to access the mycotoxin surveillance data over seasons.

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Final Network Statement:

A step closer to moving grain by rail again

By Theo Boshoff, CEO, Agbiz

Over the last 20 years, there has been a steady shift from rail transport to road transport in South Africa. The transport of bulk agricultural products such as grains, sugar cane, and timber are well suited to rail transport but reliability issues in the past have led to companies switching to road transport, thereby prioritising reliability over costs.

This trend is not good for the country as it leads to increased costs in the value chain and puts significant pressure on our road system.

Moving to a competitive system

Since the current trend is not sustainable, the presidency convened a core group of experts under the banner of Operation Vulindlela to reverse the trend. The team's proposals were captured in the Freight Logistics Roadmap adopted by cabinet towards the end of 2023. The roadmap recommended a fundamental shift towards an open, competitive system between different train operating companies (TOCs).

To facilitate this, a number of building blocks were put in place during 2024, including the:

- 'Unbundling' of Transnet Freight Rail into an infrastructure manager (TRIM), operating company (TFROC), and rolling stock leasing company (ROSCO).
- Creation of an interim economic regulator (IRAC) via the *Economic Regulation of Transport Act, 2024 (Act 6 of 2024)*.
- *Network Statement* gazetted on 19 December 2024.

The *Network Statement* sets out the process, conditions and fees that any TOC (including Transnet) must adhere to in order to operate on South Africa's rail network. This is truly a significant step. Of all the building blocks put in place, the *Network Statement* is arguably the most important factor that will determine whether private sector operators invest in rail transport or not. After all, cost

is king, and the *Network Statement* determines the cost.

Revised fee structure

In March 2024, the first draft of the *Network Statement* was released for public comments, but stakeholders raised serious concerns regarding the affordability of its proposed rate. The initial proposal was premised on Transnet Rail Infrastructure Manager's regulated asset base and the funds required to maintain it. This funding, amounting to approximately R260 billion, would be raised via a fixed fee of 19,7c per gross tonne/km (GTK). Electricity use was also factored into this fee. Many experts in the field believed that this would be unaffordable and most inputs during the public consultation phase centred on the access fee.

The revised *Network Statement* follows a different methodology. Firstly, electricity is billed to TOCs according to consumption and a fee is payable for the use of common facilities such as rail yards. A differentiated tariff will then be applied per rail corridor, per commodity. The differentiated fee factors in a floor price, namely the minimum revenue required by the infrastructure manager to maintain the corridor, and a ceiling price based on the corridor's regulated asset price. A differentiated fee is then applied per commodity between the floor price and the ceiling price.

The fee is also comprised of two elements, namely a train/km fee and GTK. The rationale for this split is as follows: A GTK fee is needed as heavier loads place greater strain on the network. Hence, just like

a toll gate, heavier trains must pay a higher fee. However, a per-kilometre fee is also needed as any train, irrespective of their weight, will take up a slot on the corridor during which no other train can run. In other words, you pay a fee for occupying the space plus a fee for the weight that the train is carrying. A train filled with cargo will pay a higher GTK fee than an empty train on its return run. However, they both need to pay the same train/km fee because both an empty and a full train take up space on the network.

These fees also differ between corridors based on the number of slots it can accommodate. For example, a bidirectional corridor would attract a lower train/km fee as trains can run in both directions. However, on a single track with limited room to allow oncoming traffic to pass, the train/km fee could be higher as a single track can accommodate fewer slots.

Finally, the fees differ dramatically between commodities. Iron ore and manganese attract the highest fees with a rate of 650c/train km and a GTK of 3,42c. Grain carriers will only pay 30c/train km and a GTK of 6,97c. General cargo, including containerised agricultural goods, will pay 30c/train km and a GTK of 9,5c.

In a welcome turn of events, these fees seem to be lower than the original proposals which will incentivise a return to rail for agricultural goods. [a](#)

For enquiries, send an email to Theo Boshoff at theo@agbiz.co.za or visit www.agbiz.co.za.



Agbiz Grain SHEQ seminar exceeds expectations

By Christal-Lize Muller, Plaas Media

The Agbiz Grain SHEQ, or safety, health, environment and quality, seminar held in Pretoria last year brought together industry leaders to discuss critical issues pertaining to the grain storage sector. The key topics included the Agbiz Grain SHEQ compliance audit, alcohol and substance abuse in the workplace (especially cannabis use), workplace injuries and challenges such as medical practitioners refusing to treat injury-on-duty (IOD) cases, employees faking IODs, and navigating compensation under the *Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act, 1993 (Act 130 of 1993)* or COIDA.

The SHEQ compliance audit

The first session addressed the need for audit criteria tailored to the grain storage sector. Due to the industry being unique with distinct risks and mitigation methods, a sector-specific audit document needs to be created. This document, developed by a sector committee with external input, will cover all compliance aspects for grain storage facilities.

Jaco Joubert, SHEQ specialist at Overberg Agri, said the grain industry has a need

for such audit criteria as industry stakeholders face common challenges related to insurance and legal obligations. Joubert was part of a panel that included Philip du Preez, managing director of VKB Brokers, Japie Greyling, senior safety supervisor at AFGRI, and Roger Fredericks, regional survey manager at Santam. The panel stressed the importance of standardising practices to support the industry's collective growth.

According to Joubert, the aim is to create a joint, industry-specific audit protocol that accommodates the variety of infrastructure and grain storage types. Risk management – including safety, health, quality, and environmental impact – is critical for business survival. Proper risk management helps maintain a company's insurability and protects its risk profile from deterioration. Joubert said that legislation must be followed. "The challenge now is to determine where we start. We must evaluate our facilities, whether old or new. From there, we will establish the audit protocol by extracting the relevant elements."

He stressed that risk management is vital for business survival, with safety,

health, quality, and environmental impact being key components of this. While the working environment of the grain industry is unique, risk management principles remain the same and must be followed to ensure the survival of a company. Insurance plays a crucial role in making businesses insurable, and a company's risk profile must be closely evaluated. Failure to manage risks can lead to a deteriorating risk profile, which could impact insurability and compliance with legislation.

Facing challenges

Joubert acknowledged the enthusiasm for the audit, but warned that significant work remains before the process can be fully implemented. "We are a diverse group within the grain industry, and we need to agree on what the audit will include, how it will be structured, and what protocols it will follow." He estimated it would take several months to finalise the audit process.

The advantage of the final product is that it will not be rigid, but will evolve as the industry learns from the process. "We will start with a basic framework, then adapt it as we grow." All companies involved are

encouraged to participate, and a forum will be created to ensure collective input and to move the project forward.

Alcohol and substance misuse

The second session focussed on aligning workplace policies and measures to address alcohol and substance misuse, a challenge heightened by the legalisation of cannabis for private use. This change has forced employers to reassess their policies as employees exercise their right to use cannabis before and after work.

Adv Leon Claassen, labour relations manager at SSK, highlighted the challenges posed by cannabis legalisation. In his opinion the biggest challenge is the impression that persists among many employees who believe they can use cannabis at home, where it is decriminalised, and bring it to the workplace or report for duty after using it earlier at home. Employers are legally required to ensure a safe and healthy workplace, creating a conflict between these two expectations.

Testing for substances

Claassen explained that there are different tests for alcohol, cannabis and other drugs. Institutions and companies face challenges such as providing the right people and equipment; however, larger companies have fewer challenges, as they can afford the right equipment and staff, while smaller companies struggle.

He noted that, unlike alcohol, which leaves the system by the next day resulting in an employee testing negative, cannabis can remain in the body for up to two weeks or longer. This raises concerns regarding workplace safety and performance, such as whether an employee is still under the influence, whether their job performance will be affected, or whether they might endanger themselves or others.

Currently only urine tests are used for detecting cannabis, said Claassen, although saliva tests are expected to be available soon. Employers must therefore have the proper equipment and trained staff to conduct these tests. Samples must be sent to a laboratory for analysis – employers cannot conduct the tests

themselves – while results take time, further complicating the process.

During the panel discussion reference was made to a court case involving a woman who used cannabis for medical purposes. In this regard, Claassen advised that employees using cannabis for this reason should inform their employers confidentially. This allows employers to assess risks based on the nature of the employee's duties. He recommended that employers stay updated on the legal framework and court rulings in South Africa. They should also ensure they have the right training, equipment, and clear workplace policies on substance use. It is vital to educate employees on the consequences of alcohol and drug use, and ensure that workplace policies are understood.

Panel members included Mariska Malan, SHEQ co-ordinator at SSK, Bianca Meintjies, VKB human capital legal advisor, Jono Blackburn, managing director of IMed, and Gerard Ramage, VKB Group SHEQ manager.

Injuries in the workplace

Registered companies pay significant sums annually to the Compensation Commissioner to comply with the *COIDA*. However, some medical practitioners and institutions are reluctant to treat employees for injuries on duty. Beth Pretorius, director of WCA Solutions, explained that a key reason for this reluctance is that medical practitioners historically have faced difficulties in recovering their medical expenses from the Compensation Fund.

Pretorius, who was part of a panel that included Ramage, Lucinda van Rensburg, managing director of Implex Legal Compliance Solutions, and Werner van der Merwe, SHEQ manager at Senwes, said that when practitioners are not paid, they might treat employees as cash or medical aid patients, complicating matters further. As a result, many are hesitant to accept injury-on-duty cases.

The solution

Pretorius highlighted the importance of understanding the problems in this case before finding solutions. One major

issue is the reporting of injuries on duty. Employers often lack proper training or access to the correct system for reporting. Therefore, training on how to report injuries promptly and correctly is crucial.

Additionally, medical practitioners sometimes fail to meet all the requirements, such as using correct tariff codes and submitting complete medical reports to the CompEasy system. While compliance is improving in terms of newer claims, historical claims remain a challenge. Medical practitioners need to revisit older claims, ensuring they meet all requirements within the prescribed three-year period. Some old debts may need to be written off as bad debt, even if they could have been claimed in the past. Pretorius stressed that the key to resolving these issues is correct claim registration and ensuring all documentation is in order.

Fake claims

While Pretorius has not encountered many fake claims, she advised employers to always err on the side of caution. Even if an employee reports an injury, employers must ensure the employee receives medical treatment. The WCL2 form, used for reporting accidents, asks whether the employer is satisfied that the injury occurred as reported. If the answer is 'no', the employer must provide a reason, and it is up to the Compensation Fund to decide whether to accept liability. Employers must investigate whether the injury is work-related.

Advice and recommendations

Pretorius urged employers to be prepared before an injury occurs. They must be registered on the CompEasy system to register claims, as injuries must be reported online within seven days. However, registering on the system can take weeks or even months, so being prepared is essential. Employers should ensure proper training for handling injury-on-duty cases, and employees must work safely.

With everything in place, injuries can be reported correctly, ensuring that medical providers are paid promptly and are more likely to treat employees for injuries on duty.²

For more information, contact Jaco Joubert at jjoubert@overbergagri.co.za, Adv Leon Claassen at leon.claassen@ssk.co.za or Beth Pretorius at beth@wcclaims.co.za.

ESG: Implications for the grain and oilseeds sector

By Annelize Crosby, head of legal intelligence, Agbiz

The abbreviation ESG stands for environmental, social and governance. It is a framework used internationally by stakeholders to assess an organisation’s business practices and performance on various sustainability and ethical issues.

ESG is about sustainability in the broader sense, not just about environmental issues. In agriculture the environmental factors are quite prominent though. Environmental factors are paramount in ESG investing within the agricultural sector. These factors include issues such as sustainable land use, water conservation, biodiversity protection, and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

The social factors focus on the wellbeing of agricultural workers, local communities, and consumers. Governance factors focus on management structures and practices to ensure accountability, transparency, and ethical behaviour.

The prominence of concerns regarding climate change as well as human rights and health, are driving forces behind consumer and investor demand for ESG reporting. ESG considerations are likely to become increasingly vital for agribusinesses in South Africa. Meeting specific ESG criteria may become the difference between being included or excluded by lenders, retailers, consumers, investors, and local and export markets.

S&P Global recently produced the ESG materiality map for agribusiness, which clearly illustrates that both from a credit and stakeholder perspective, the critical

issues at this point in time are climate risk and biodiversity.

Grain industry considerations

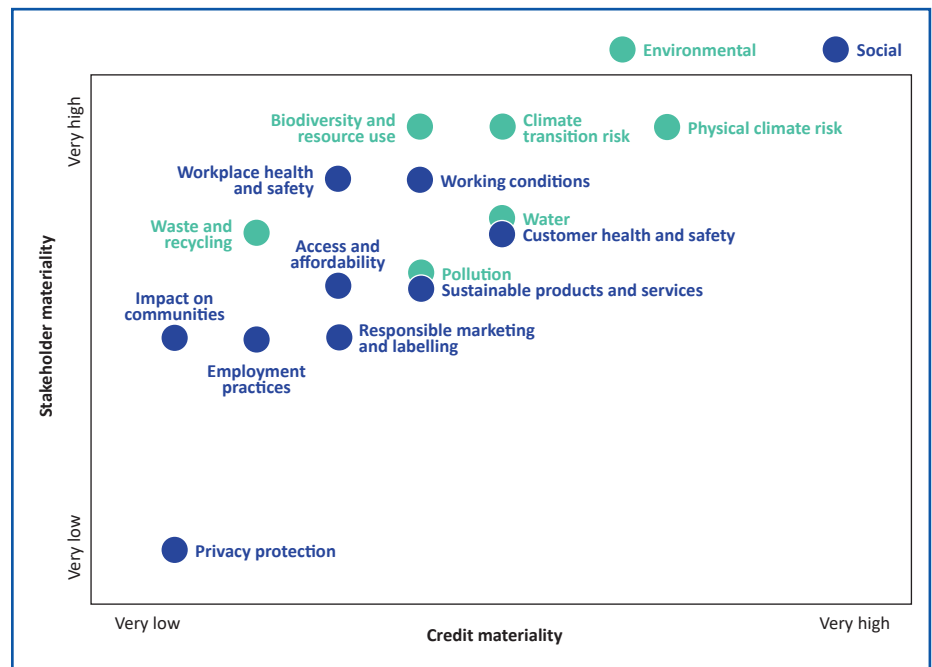
It seems as though grain producers in Australia are being encouraged to recognise the importance of ESG compliance and to consider the opportunities that ESG may create. Melissa McKenzie from Smith Shearer, an Australian business consultancy

focussing on the farming industry, wrote in a recent blog: “ESG is becoming an unavoidable part of doing business, much like the adoption of electronic livestock identification. While concerns about cost and time are valid, ESG compliance can ultimately balance out, with improved farm management, enhanced market access, and significant competitive advantages. For grain farmers, this shift isn’t just a box to tick

Figure 1: The three pillars of ESG. (Source: TechTarget)



Figure 2: ESG materiality map for the agribusiness sector. (Source: S&P Global)



but an opportunity to grow and secure your business for the future.”

Some of the things that grain producers can do from an environmental perspective are optimising soil health, conserving water, adopting sustainable farming practices, and reducing emissions. Discussions are currently underway between industry stakeholders, the National Department of Agriculture and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment regarding sectoral emissions targets for agriculture.

The alternative to setting and enforcing sectoral targets is a carbon tax on agriculture. At this point in time, a 100% basic tax-free allowance applies to the agricultural sector, effectively excluding the sector from the carbon tax during the first phase, but this may change going forward. The grain industry is actively involved in these discussions.

From a value chain perspective, issues such as green energy use, reducing

post-harvest grain losses, and waste management are of importance.

Agbiz workshops on ESG

In order to guide and assist its members, Agbiz has embarked upon an ESG initiative to inform and equip members to better understand ESG and the reporting frameworks and standards. A number of workshops in this regard have been held in collaboration with Agrifusion. The JSE disclosure guideline was also discussed in some detail. An ESG roadmap was shared with members to explain the step-by-step implementation of and the elements of developing an ESG framework and report.

It is clear from the workshops that collaboration and standardisation are critical factors in driving effective ESG reporting and advocacy efforts within the South African agriculture sector.

Points to consider

ESG reporting is probably here to stay, and while it is not compulsory for private companies or trusts and sole proprietors

at this stage, the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC) has embarked on a significant initiative by introducing mandatory ESG reporting for public and state-owned companies from 2025 onwards.

There is growing pressure on all businesses, also in the agricultural sector, to voluntarily report on their environmental, social, and governance impacts. However, there is a lack of awareness and knowledge on how to go about this reporting in some circles. Agbiz is attempting to create awareness around this issue and to equip members with the necessary knowledge to assess their risks and opportunities in this regard.

The agricultural sector, and even the grain and oilseeds sector on its own, is very diverse and the value chain quite complex, and there is a cost to reporting that cannot be ignored. There are, however, also many benefits to embarking on this journey and opportunities that can be unlocked. ²

For more information, send an email to Annelize Crosby at annelize@agbiz.co.za.

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+27 11 063 8000
jerry.maritz@afgri.co.za
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GRAIN

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akriel@agrimark.co.za
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A DIVISION OF **BKB**

+27 21 807 8936
christie.engelbrecht@bkbgs.co.za
www.bkb.co.za

GWK

innovate agriculture

+27 53 298 8200
tomm@gwk.co.za
www.gwk.co.za

NWK

+27 18 633 1000
jdurand@nwk.co.za
www.nwk.co.za

OVERBERG
SINCE 1918

+27 28 214 3854
johanl@overbergagri.co.za
www.overbergagri.co.za

OVK

+27 51 923 4500
rudolphvw@ovk.co.za
www.ovk.co.za

SCHOEMAN

+27 13 665 7700
brent@witklip.co.za
www.schoemangroup.co.za

Senwes

+27 18 464 7800
Wikus.Grobler@senwes.co.za
www.senwes.co.za

Silostrat

+27 57 391 1900
cassie@silostrat.com
www.silostrat.com

SSK

+27 28 514 8600
Pieter.Malan@ssk.co.za
www.ssk.co.za

TWK
agri

+27 17 824 1005
aduenage@twkagri.com
www.twkagri.com

vkb

+27 58 863 8111
francoisf@vkb.co.za
www.vkb.co.za



Malcolm Holman
malcolmh@aelab.co.za
www.AELab.co.za



Paul Burke
paul.burke@adpsa.co.za
www.adpsa.co.za



Taryn Browne
taryn.browne@buhlergroup.com
www.buhlergroup.com



Chantelle Henning
chantelle@henchem.co.za
www.henchem.co.za



Cole Stanton
cole.stanton@intreso.com
www.intreso.com



Munro van der Westhuizen
munro@thisisronin.com
www.thisisronin.com



Philip van der Merwe
philip@rhineruhr.net
www.rhineruhr.net



Hanlie Kroese
hanlie.kroese@santam.co.za
www.santam.co.za



Gianluca Della Riccia
gianluca.dellariccia@wamgroup.com
www.wamgroup.co.za

Points to ponder

By Jannie de Villiers



Balancing of trends

At the beginning of every year, I do some research into the different trends that emerged – be it trends in leadership, management, business, the economy, mindfulness, psychology, and trends in the church.

I immediately recognised quite a number in my own environment, in the broader South African context, and in agriculture in particular. New trends and the unknown can be concerning to some, but I'm going to share some of these trends and ideas as to how address them when you encounter them in your own life.

Technology vs human interaction

A trend discussed in almost all the articles I've read was the **influence of technology**, specifically artificial intelligence (AI). Striking a balance between using AI and not losing the interaction between humans is necessary to build and maintain relationships. Agriculture in South Africa is very much based on the fostering of relationships and personal interaction. My advice for 2025 is not to neglect your relationships and human interaction while using any kind of technology.

This brings me to another trend: The challenge of **managing office-based teams and those working remotely**. Old school leaders and managers will probably pull rank and force all employees to work at the office where they can be monitored, and it can be ensured they put in a hard day's work. The newer generations value employers who are more flexible, allowing their employees to work remotely. My suggestion is to develop your skill as employer or manager to manage a

scenario where both work options are accommodated.

Never too old to learn

Two other trends that I always talk about are **continuous learning** and **personal development**. I've been attending an annual event called the Global Leadership Summit since 1999. This is where I benchmark my skillset against the best in the world and identify areas of potential personal growth. I always shared some of the new ideas discussed at the summit with the teams at my office.

Continuous learning is something that takes place intentionally. Pick a subject, find a book or two on the topic, and read it with intent. Scanning through it is not going to help you learn anything new. Make notes and list some ideas to share with your family or your team at the office.

You can also talk to people with experience on the subject. Make an appointment and send him or her a list of questions you need answers to.

Take care of your wellness

The last trend I want to touch on is **personal wellness** – your own and of those around you. I recently listened to Harvard Business School professor, Arthur Brooks, who teaches a subject called 'happiness' to MBA students. He explained that happiness has three components, namely enjoyment, satisfaction, and meaning. I remember him saying that satisfaction can only be experienced when you struggle to achieve something. Struggle is nothing new to South Africans, especially if you are in the agricultural sector.


Meaning covers the 'why' questions in life, such as why are you on earth and what is God's plan for your life? Your wellness also strongly depends on it.

Judging by the data on leaders' wellness and the burn-out rate among leaders and pastors, this is surely a serious wakeup call to us all going into 2025. There are various tools and knowledgeable people who can assist you in making healthy choices to promote your wellness. However, make it your goal this year to also ask those around you, especially those close to you, how they are doing, and really listen when they tell you.

Pay close attention to others

My wife and I have decided to continue inviting families to dinner, but instead of small talk around the dinner table, we intend to spend time listening to people's hearts and establish the state of their wellness. We have a set of cards with questions on them that we discuss after dinner. These questions help us to hear their hearts, and it works very well.

A sheep producer regularly gets his sheep together and slowly looks them over with an experienced eye to determine the status of his flock. When a sick one is identified, he pays special attention to it. The same applies to those close to you; look at them and pay special attention to each person to prevent burn-out or spiritual or mental health issues.

Your workplace probably has some goals for 2025 that were communicated to you. Do you have a set of goals for yourself and your family? If not, find time to sit down and enquire from the Lord as to what is on His heart for you for this year. 

For enquiries, send an email to Jannie de Villiers at Jannie@devilliersfamily.co.za.

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